

Family Planning Thoughts for Rheumatoid Disease

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This is not a comprehensive list, but it was designed to spark a discussion with your doctor and try to make sure you're prepared. It might not be a bad idea to print this list and take it with you.

I Want a Family Some Day, but Not Now

- Always ask your doctor about the impact your medications will have on your ability to have kids in the future.
- Ask (seriously) if your rheumatologist can fully support your decision to have kids (not all do). Come to a consensus or find a doctor who can support you.
- Ask your rheumatologist how she will support you during pregnancy. Ask about other patients who have had kids. Make sure this matches your needs.

Trying to Conceive

- Are you off of all the necessary medications for the recommended time? Does your doc say "go?"
- Are you and your rheumatologist on the same page with your care?
- Can you call your rheumatologist if you start to flare? # _____
- How soon could you get an appointment (*very very important*)? _____
- What can you do safely if you start to flare? _____

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- Ask doctor to make a list of do's and don't's (examples: TENS unit, splints, Aspercreme, ibuprofen).
 - Look into entering a drug study or registry if you stay on meds (Google *OTIS Studies*).
 - If going off meds, get a handicap sticker for your car.
 - Prepare friends and family for your journey. Get support.

Pregnancy

- This will likely be when you will feel your best, so...
 - Put crib together
 - Get a good changer at a good height (very important for your back).
 - Get a good chair for feedings
 - Get a carseat and prepare for the dreaded carseat button. Find an easier button or one that can be adapted if your hands get bad (think velcro and something removable to raise the button. Keep baby safety, choking specifically, in mind).

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- Talk to your doctor about physical therapy after delivery. Women with rheumatoid disease tend to abuse their backs, which get very weak following delivery, as stretched out stomach muscles don't support the back well.
- Go to a good baby store and ask them to fit carseats and strollers in your car. Some strollers are too big for trunks. There's a balance in having a big stroller that can carry a lot and what you can load and unload into your car. Baby Depot (inside Burlington Coat Factory) did a great job helping me and took strollers out to my car to determine a good fit.
- Make an appointment with the baby's future pediatrician. Discuss health, breastfeeding, and medication issues.
- Make those breastfeeding decisions with your doctor spouse. Your spouse should have appropriate input.
- Research breastfeeding and formula options. Look at what medications you can and cannot take during breastfeeding.
- Prepare for a flare.
 - Call in friends and family.
 - Hire help if possible/needed.
 - Have a back-up plan. Most women flare 4-6 weeks postpartum.
- In advance, make follow-up appointments with your rheumatologist. If you're not flaring, you can appropriately cancel them. Think 4 weeks, 8 weeks, and 12 weeks.
- Visit MomsWithRA.org. Talk to other moms on Facebook and/or the forums for support.